

Harry Potter and the Functions of Popular Culture

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“For Sociology really to be a science of things, the generality of phenomena must be taken as the criterion of their normality.” (Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method* 104)

Heavy metal music has been described as a threat to “our” children and rap is touted as a threat to "our" society (Binder). Music videos provide a framework that justifies rape and other forms of sexual violence (Jhally). The reproduction of artwork in mass-produced books has destroyed the special "aura" of art (Benjamin), and finally, Horkheimer and Adorno have asserted that television has made cultural consumers passive (28). Sociological analyses have produced a lengthy list of critiques of popular culture such that we must wonder why we bother with popular culture at all. What could be more pathological than a social element that threatens a society and its members while also reducing the good life to a commodity and reducing persons to consumers?

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